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## THE RETURN TO NATURE IN ENGLISH POETRY OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY C. A. MOORE

Recent investigation has corrected the old idea that no appreciation of nature is to be found in the early part of the eighteenth century. Studies made by Miss Reynolds<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Havens<sup>2</sup> have shown that critics once exaggerated the differences between the age of Pope and that of his successors. In the early part of the eighteenth century "God's outdoor world" was not, as commentators once held, uniformly despised or neglected. What we once considered two distinct "schools" really shade into each other imperceptibly, and many individual writers defy strict classification. It is now evident that the "return to nature" — a reaction from classicism — began earlier than we formerly supposed, and developed more gradually. Like other changes in literature, it was an evolution rather than a revolution.

From another point of view, however, our investigation of the subject has been less satisfactory. The attempt of criticism to account for this growth of interest in nature, including uncultivated nature, has not yet gone beyond the traditional explanation that it came from the renewed study and imitation of earlier literary practice. The inadequacy of this supposition is generally recognized. The revival of such poets as Shakespeare, Milton, and Spenser, and the additional influence also of the few medieval writers who were actually known to English poets, leave still to be accounted for in the eighteenth century, and later, some of the most distinctive qualities in our poetry of nature.

In the first place, this explanation fails to account for the modern poetical interest in mountains. As all critics agree, the development of the feeling for nature in recent literature is to be gauged largely by the attitude towards the austere phases of it — winter, storms, deserts, seas, and especially mountains. Although the change of sentiment that brought these "deformities" into gen-

<sup>1</sup> Myra Reynolds, *The Treatment of Nature in English Poetry between Pope and Wordsworth*, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1909.

<sup>2</sup> R. D. Havens, "Romantic Aspects of the Age of Pope," *P. M. L. A.*, xx, 3 (September, 1912).

eral favor was neither so late in point of time nor so sudden as early critics held, there evidently was such a change somewhere between the Restoration and the close of the eighteenth century. The striking fact is that this new literary fashion had never before been prevalent in any literature. Appreciation of the grand and rugged was virtually unknown to Greek and Roman writers.<sup>3</sup> Humboldt<sup>4</sup> and Biese<sup>5</sup> have discovered a few instances in out-of-the-way medieval prose; but the tendency was short-lived, because it was opposed by the Church, and no one will contend that these few obscure cases were known by English poets of the eighteenth century. In Scottish literature, one might naturally expect, on account of local scenery, to find such appreciation developed early; but Veitch states it as a "curious and puzzling" fact that "imaginative sympathy for the grand and powerful in nature — as mountain height and cataract, the foaming flood, the force of ocean, and the dark wind-swept wood as it sways in the storm" was very rare in Scottish letters before the closing years of the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> This modern note is absent also from our early English literature. Ruskin has pointed out the deficiency in Shakespeare.<sup>7</sup> In the same connection, Shairp says it is certain "that the power of mountains is not expressed in that poetry which expresses almost every other conceivable thing, and that the mountain rapture had to lie dumb for two more centuries before it found utterance in English song."<sup>8</sup> One or two exceptions in Milton's verse are apparent rather than real.<sup>9</sup> According to Perry, the first traces of the new spirit in English literature are to be found "towards the middle" of the eighteenth century. "Before that time," he adds, "we find mountains spoken of in terms of the severest reprobation."<sup>10</sup> Phelps discovered the first notable interest of the kind in Gray's

<sup>3</sup> See J. C. Shairp, *On Poetic Interpretation of Nature*, 1877, ch. ix, x; Alfred Biese, *Die Entwicklung des Naturgefühls bei den Griechen und Römern*, 1882; John Veitch, *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry*, 2 vols., 1887, I, ch. III.

<sup>4</sup> *Kosmos*, ed. 1850, II, Part I, *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> *The Development of the Feeling for Nature in the Middle Ages and Modern Times* (tr.), 1905, ch. iv, v.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Modern Painters*: "Of Mountain Beauty."

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>10</sup> T. S. Perry, *English Literature in the Eighteenth Century*, 1883, p. 145.

comments on the Alps in his journal and letters of 1739.<sup>11</sup> The forward date set by most, if not all, of these statements is inaccurate; but the consensus of all investigation is that this liberal attitude began to be prominent in the first half of the eighteenth century,<sup>12</sup> and that it was virtually an innovation.

In the second place, the ordinary explanation fails equally to account for the modern habit of regarding nature as a great moral and spiritual force acting upon the life of man—another trait of our poetry that came into prominence between the Restoration and the time of Wordsworth. Like the affection for mountains, this sentiment is of distinctly modern growth. Again, the Middle Ages have yielded a few exceptions to the general statement;<sup>13</sup> but through the disapproval of the Church, the theory died in embryo, and the few who proclaimed it could have had no influence on those poets who fostered a similar doctrine in English literature.<sup>14</sup> There are intimations of it also in the writings of Henry Vaughan, who was impressed by the spiritual force of material things; but Vaughan's interpretation, hardly more than a hint of the full theory, is exceptional in English, just as a passage or two in the

<sup>11</sup> W. L. Phelps, *The Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement*, 1893 (see pp. 167-9).

<sup>12</sup> See Miss Reynolds, *op. cit.*, ch. I; Perry, *op. cit.*, ch. IV. Some additional evidence of Restoration dislike for the rugged in nature is to be found in the Duchess of Newcastle's *The Life of the First Duke of Newcastle* (1668), Everyman's, p. ix, and Grammont's *Memoirs*, Bohn's Library, pp. 193-9. The following passage from Mrs. Haywood's *Life's Progress through the Passions: or the Adventures of Natura* (1748) is an excellent illustration of the change in popular taste: "Whether you climb the craggy mountains or traverse the flowery vale; whether thick woods set limits to the sight, or the wild common yields unbounded prospect;—whether the ocean rolls in solemn state before you, or gentle streams run purling by your side, nature in all her different shapes delights. . . . The stupendous mountains of the Alps, after the plains and soft embowered recesses of Avignon, gave perhaps a no less delightful sensation to the mind of Natura." (Cited by G. F. Whicher, *The Life and Romances of Mrs. Eliza Haywood*, Columbia Univ. Press, 1915, p. 157, note.) See also *Gent. Mag.*, xx, p. 506 (1750) and xxi, pp. 211-3 (1751) and earlier examples cited below.

<sup>13</sup> Biese, *The Development*, etc., ch. v.

<sup>14</sup> As Biese points out, these Catholic mystics were very different from such later mystics as Jacob Behmen. Moreover, the influence of Behmen, although he was translated by William Law, was confined to a very small set of Englishmen, who were apart from the current of popular literature.

sonnets of William of Hawthornden and a generally neglected passage in Charles Cotton's *The Retirement* are exceptions to seventeenth century inappreciation of mountains. Examples cited later will demonstrate that by the middle of the eighteenth century, on the contrary, this ethical and spiritual valuation of the physical world had become the rule in English poetry rather than the exception.

If, then, these two characteristics did not come from the imitation of earlier popular literature, did they originate with the modern poets themselves, or were they due to some influence which has been neglected in our study of literary origins? My contention is that both of them sprang originally from the common source of learned philosophy. Appreciation of the uncouth forms of nature and the worship of all nature are inseparable phases of a general movement. It is not a mere coincidence that the two developed contemporaneously. There had existed a traditional prejudice against the uninhabitable and inaccessible regions of the world, and the idea of beauty was seldom associated with them until this prejudice had been removed by a new conception of nature in general. To account for this change of feeling, we need to go beyond the borders of all popular literature; the source of it is to be found in certain philosophic conclusions first established by learned speculation in the latter part of the seventeenth and the early part of the eighteenth century, and then popularized by poetical imitators.

By neglecting this source of influence, critics have given only a partial explanation of a literary evolution that can be explained in full. The "return to nature" in popular works, far from being the simple process of mere reversion implied by the phrase, represents a great variety of appreciation, some degrees of which were entirely new. The modern poetic conception is the composite result of many forces. In literature of the early eighteenth century it would be possible to distinguish among these with considerable precision. Some of them existed still in a detached and initial state. This was a formative period, when the various elements were beginning to coalesce into that rich interpretation of the natural world most familiar to us through the poetry of Wordsworth. To study these separate elements in detail, there would be required such elaborate classifications of the feeling for nature as those pro-

posed by Shairp<sup>15</sup> and Veitch.<sup>16</sup> But for the present purpose of distinguishing between those characteristics that arose from earlier popular writers and those that were added through imitation of the learned philosophers, it is sufficient to group all the various modes of treatment under two inclusive heads — the descriptive and the synthetic.

The first class is characterized by the "simple and childish delight" which men in all ages have felt, in varying degrees, under the tonic influence of blue skies, budding flowers, green grass, and the other benign manifestations of the outdoor world — what Léon Morel characterizes in Chaucer as "une naïve et superficielle sensualité."<sup>17</sup> Literary treatment of this kind attempts only to reproduce in detail the sensuous or emotional effect occasioned by the individual thing contemplated; there is no reference to the system of nature as a vast, organic whole, and the degree of feeling expressed is comparatively slight. In this class fall practically all the illustrations of the "romantic revival" collected from the early eighteenth century. Miss Reynolds recognizes that in the early cases she has cited — roughly speaking, before 1725 — there is no attempt to interpret nature in terms of man's moral and spiritual life. The passages show only that the writers had grown weary of the descriptive formulas imitated from Vergil, Horace, and the other Latin poets, and were becoming restive under the restraint of the neo-classic rule. With the slight exception of Parnell's *Hymn to Contentment* (1722), of which I shall speak later, the entire list of illustrations emphasized by Miss Reynolds indicates that in the early stages of the "return" the only marked disposition was to be more truthful in reporting what men saw and heard. The additions made by Dr. Havens are of the same kind; the attitude of the writers is "unreflective," and nature is praised only for its picturesqueness.

These passages are far more numerous than was formerly supposed, and they are of great importance historically. But they represent only one element of the modern conception, and that not the most important. Denoting as they do merely a revolt from the negativeness of the neo-classic prescription, they are

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, ch. VIII: "Some of the Ways in which Poets Deal with Nature."

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, ch. I: "The Feeling for Nature—Its Various Forms."

<sup>17</sup> Léon Morel, *James Thomson, Sa vie et ses œuvres*, Paris, 1895, p. 359.

what we might expect in any period of literature when the natural impulse is not repressed by an artificial code. In them we have actually a *return* to previous literary practice. The treatment accorded is fragmentary and superficial; of the universal system and spirit nothing is said. Consequently here, as in our still earlier literature, there is little incentive to extend the appreciation to nature as a whole. Even Allan Ramsay, responsive as he was to the charms of the outdoor world, was unaffected by the beauty of its "deformities." "Though brought up in a rugged part of Scotland," says Miss Reynolds, "he seems to have had none of the modern feeling for mountains."<sup>18</sup>

Under the second head — the synthetic treatment — I include collectively all the varied conceptions of nature which regard, not merely the sensuous beauty of the individual object or scene, but the ultimate significance of such parts considered as details or links of a universal system which is to be appraised rightly only in its completeness. The simplest and least poetic form of this theoretic valuation is the argumentative statement that every detail, however unlovely or even repulsive in itself, is to be defended as serving some indispensable function in the vast economy of the entire scheme. The highest and most poetic form is the assumption that all nature is an intimate revelation of God to man — a power for good, therefore, in its constant appeal to man's moral and spiritual faculties. Those who adopt this view recognize a divine spirit permeating and identifying all creation. Shairp's characterization is excellent: "The best and highest way in which Nature ministers to the soul and spirit of man is when it becomes to him a symbol translucent with the light of the moral and spiritual world."<sup>19</sup> This reverence may express itself in the doctrine of the Deity immanent in nature, or it may very easily, especially in poetry, take the form of a vague pantheism virtually identifying Creator and created. Evidently the utilitarian theory can have only an indirect value in the history of poetry; it is important only as preparing the way for something better. But the other conclusion is of the greatest importance, for it is one of the chief distinctions of recent poetry.

For this whole range of synthetic interpretation — the utilitarian and the more poetic form — popular literature is demon-

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 115.

strably indebted to the Augustan philosophers. In brief, it was through poetical imitators of these that English poetry acquired the various forms of defense and praise of the irregular and grand aspects of nature and likewise the apotheosis of nature in general.

Before undertaking to adduce evidence on the point, however, it is necessary to note an inevitable prejudice against this view. The body of learned philosophy to which I refer is designated as rationalism. The intimate appreciation of nature, especially the stern phases, is ordinarily catalogued as one of the distinctive marks of romanticism. According to the usual classification, *rationalism* and *romanticism* are irreconcilably opposed. Quite naturally, therefore, most accounts of popular literature which do not wholly ignore the existence of such philosophy actually represent all phases of the romantic movement as a revolt from its influence.<sup>20</sup> The ordinary view, stated or implied, is that the development of the feeling for nature was due, positively, to the reassertion of an earlier literary ideal, and, negatively, to a complete divorce of literature from the arid formulas of the rationalists. Speaking of the romantic movement as a whole, Professor Beers explains it as a reaction "against the rationalistic, prosaic, skeptical, commonsense spirit of the age, represented in England by deistical writers like Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Bolingbroke, and Tindal, in the department of religious and moral philosophy,"<sup>21</sup> etc. A later critic in the field, Dr. W. H. Durham, holds that "rationalism is another name for crude dogmatism."<sup>22</sup> He evidently applies the word rationalism to philosophy as well as to literary criticism, for he very prettily explains the deterioration of Charles Gildon in the following manner: "Once a Catholic, he became a Deist; once a critic, he became a criticaster. . . Certainly in both cases he substituted a barren and superficial rationalism for conceptions at once more fruitful and more profound."

The element of truth contained in such derogatory estimates of the rationalists has misled us into the natural error of over-

<sup>20</sup> See, however, W. J. Courthope, *A History of English Poetry*, 1905, v, ch. x.

<sup>21</sup> H. A. Beers, *English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century*, 1910, p. 362. The same opinion is expressed in *Berkeley and Percival*, the *Nation*, C, 2586, 2587, Jan. 21 and 28, 1915; but the author, I am informed, has seen fit to modify his view.

<sup>22</sup> *Critical Essays of the Eighteenth Century*, 1915, p. xvii.



generalizing, either by formal statement or by implication. Setting out with the complete antithesis authorized by the dictionary, we have assumed that it is valid also with reference to two schools of thought in all their historical ramifications, and hence to the individual writers composing those schools. The pitfalls of such a method are obvious. Since romanticism is used loosely to include many vaguely related notions, it is unwise to assume that these various aspects are reducible to any one general cause, or that, conversely, whatever clashes with the romantic ideal at one point opposes it at all others. The difficulty is enhanced also by the similar inclusiveness of the term rationalism. In some respects the line of cleavage is easily definable. In the treatment of nature it is not. Any broad statement that even implies a hard-and-fast demarcation of the kind falls into the old error of insisting too much upon final definition and the use of exclusive terms. This pigeon-hole method assumes a sharper historical conflict between the "pure reason" of the rationalists and the "imagination" of the romanticists than actually existed. The general supposition that the doctrine of reasonableness utterly precluded imaginative activity on the part of the individual thinker is, at least in all that relates to physical nature, unjust. The faulty conclusion arises partly from our virtual identification of the neo-classic view and the rationalistic. It must be remembered that rationalism was merely one of several ingredients composing the neo-classic prescription. The express inhibitions concerning nature came from the literary lawgivers rather than the philosophical. The philosophy of the rationalists, considered historically, was, I hold, not only unopposed to an intimate appreciation of the outdoor world, but was actually the chief agent in eventually forcing the minute study and love of nature as a whole upon popular attention.

A comparative study of learned and popular literature of the Augustan age will demonstrate: (1) that even the earliest and simplest phase of rationalistic theory — that which was inoffensive to the Church — contributed something to our poetic creed by offering an apology for those parts of creation which before had been condemned as "deformities"; (2) that the unorthodox length to which this speculative doctrine was carried by the "free thinkers," or Deists, was the main incentive to our positive love of the grand and rugged, and also to our apotheosis of nature as a

whole. If romanticism may be taken in the popular interpretation of including our modern sympathy for all nature and a belief in its moral and spiritual associations with human life — such a creed as we find, for example, in Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley — then Deism may be said to be the starting-point for our modern romantic treatment of nature.

## I

Insistence on the beauty of universal nature was a necessity of rationalistic theory. The triumph of this philosophy in the seventeenth century was due to the fact that the Church, in order to maintain her prestige in a scientific age, was compelled to defend herself against a growing suspicion that the Christian dogma was incompatible with recent discoveries in natural science. In their endeavor to reconcile the two claims, the Christian apologists at the outset allowed almost equal weight to natural revelation and supernatural, holding that there is no real conflict between the two. In their deference to the evidence afforded by scientific knowledge all rationalists agreed up to the point of regarding the outward world a faithful record of the Creator's power and beneficence, a visible embodiment of Divine perfection. This argument from nature was soon developed so convincingly, however, that it threatened to render all other evidence of God superfluous, and thereby produced dissension in the Church as to how far it might be pursued. The extreme, or Deistic, view was that human reason requires no other revelation than the outward and visible world. Even those rationalists who still accepted the Bible held its utterances to be merely a confirmation of universal truths already set forth to the reason of man in the Book of Nature. The line between these two positions — the heretical and the orthodox — was not always clearly marked. But whether a given philosopher became a "free thinker" and denied the doctrine of supernatural revelation or whether he managed by compromise to maintain his standing in the Church, the difference was one, not of kind, but of degree. The beauty of the natural universe, as expounded by the new science, occupied the central position in all rationalistic speculation.

Evidently a universal system full of flaws could not meet the demands of such reasoning. From the first there was a tendency

to hold nature perfect in every detail, and the necessity of doing so became gradually more evident. Such optimism, however, was confronted at once by traditional opposition. No difficulty was found in applying the theory to the serene and physically agreeable aspects of nature; the real problem was how to include the sterner phases, especially an angry sea or the jagged pinnacles of the mountain. The Calvinist looked upon these as imperfections due to original sin, and the earlier atheist as a proof that our world was not created by God. Whether or not either of these views was held by any considerable portion of English society, they were proclaimed with sufficient persistence to stimulate controversy and bring into sharp relief the issues of a long and spirited debate. They thus served to denote the chief point of attack upon which the "physico-theology" of the rationalists was to be directed throughout the first half of the eighteenth century.

The case of extreme reprobation is set forth most nakedly by Thomas Burnet in *Telluris Theoria Sacra* (1681-9), which very curiously grafts the biblical doctrine of original sin upon what purports to be a scientific hypothesis. Burnet's theory of the antediluvian world was that it had consisted of a perfectly flat surface. In the goodly pristine state, the work of the Creator was not disfigured by ugly protuberances of rocks and mountains.<sup>23</sup> Such unsightly objects were the lasting monuments of the wrath which later moved God to alter the habitation of man. Puerile as this explanation is, Burnet's book was held in great esteem. Addison

<sup>23</sup> "In this smooth earth were the first Scenes of the World, and the first Generations of Mankind; it had the Beauty of Youth and blooming Nature, fresh and fruitful, and not a Wrinkle, Scar or Fracture in all its Body; no Rocks nor Mountains, no hollow caves, nor gaping Channels, but even and uniform all over." *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (Fourth ed. 2 vols., 1719-22, I, bk. I, ch. VI, pp. 90-1). It should be added, however, that Burnet was impressed by the majesty of the seas and mountains in spite of his theory. "The greatest objects of Nature are, methinks, the most pleasing to behold; and next to the great concave of the Heavens, and these boundless Regions where the Stars inhabit, there is nothing that I look upon with more pleasure than the wide sea and the Mountains of the Earth. There is something august and stately in the Air of these things, that inspires the Mind with great Thoughts and Passions; we do naturally, upon such occasions, think of God and his Greatness." (I, bk. I, ch. XI, p. 191.) For his full treatment of mountains, see vol. I, bk. I, ch. IV, V, VI, XI, especially XI.

contributed a Latin ode to the edition of 1689. In *Spectator* No. 38 Steele recommended the "learned Dr. Burnet" and in No. 146 quoted a long extract approvingly. Thomas Warton spoke of Burnet as combining Milton's imagination with solid powers of understanding.<sup>24</sup> An English translation of his book, made by the author himself and dedicated to Queen Mary, was published the year the complete Latin version appeared (1689). By 1726 the English version had reached its sixth edition, and in the meantime Burnet's theory had been the occasion of much controversy.<sup>25</sup> The other argument—that of the atheists—was popularized chiefly by Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*. Lucretius's poem is little more than a versified résumé of Epicurus and other pagan atheists who saw in the physical as well as the moral imperfections of the world a negation of God and therefore resolved all nature into "a fortuitous concourse of atoms." Their objection to the world consisted largely in the repulsiveness of the same features condemned by Burnet, especially mountains. Both of these un-

<sup>24</sup> *Essay on Pope*, I, 115, 266.

<sup>25</sup> The extent of discussion is indicated by the following works: Herbert Crofts, Bishop of Hereford, *Some Animadversions upon . . . "The Theory of the Earth"* (1685); Erasmus Warren, *Geologia, or a Discourse concerning the Earth before the Deluge and Defence of the Discourse . . . wherein the Form and Properties ascribed to it, in a Book entitled, The Theory of the Earth, etc., are excepted against* (1690); Thomas Burnet, *An Answer to the late Exceptions made by Mr. Erasmus Warren against "The Theory of the Earth"* (1690); John Beaumont, *Considerations on a Book entitled The Theory of the Earth* (1693), and *Postscript to same* (1694); John Keill, *An Examination of Dr. Burnet's Theory of the Earth* (1695); Robert St. Clair, *The Abyssinian Philosophy considered and refuted; or Telluris Theoria neither sacred nor agreeable to reason* (1697); S. P., Gent., *Six Philosophical Essays upon several subjects, viz. Dr. Burnet's Theory of Earth, etc.* (1699); Anonymous, *Reflections upon the Theory of the Earth; occasioned by a late Examination of it* (1699); Burnet's replies to Warren and Keill, appended to ed. 6 of the *Theory* (1726). For still other opponents, see John Ray, *The Wisdom of God manifested in the Works of Creation* (1691) and *Three Physico-Theological Discourses concerning, 1. The primitive Chaos, and Creation of the world. 2. The general Deluge, its causes and effects. 3. The Dissolution of the World and future Conflagration; wherein are largely discoursed the production and rise of Mountains* (1692); John Woodward, *An Essay towards a Natural History of the Earth* (1695); William Whiston, *New Theory of the Earth and Vindication of same* (1696).

favorable views of nature — the extreme orthodox and the atheistic — were opposed all the more vigorously because these were integral parts of two general systems that were opposed by rationalism on various other grounds.

The defense against such charges derived its main impetus from the Cambridge Platonists, in whose works English rationalism began to take definite form. The most influential of these was Ralph Cudworth's *True Intellectual System* (1678); his philosophy had a marked effect on all subsequent speculation during the Augustan period. In Cudworth's assumptions is found at least the germ of all that was afterwards said by the champions of natural creation — both the orthodox rationalists and the Deists. The orthodox could not safely go beyond the argument of mere utility; quite naturally, therefore, this doctrine was the first to be perfected and to secure general adoption. However imperfect individual details of the natural world may appear, they were defended as serving some imperative purpose in the intricate economy of the universal plan. Cudworth appropriated this general statement from Greek philosophy, chiefly from the Platonists, and he used it only in opposition to atheism.<sup>26</sup> Later, however, it served equally well to refute all other doctrines that questioned the perfection of nature.

Those who challenged the theory of Burnet immediately applied this general thesis to the specific case of mountains. For example, John Keill, in 1695, charged Burnet with "presuming boldness" for asserting that "Mountains are placed in no order one with another, that can either respect use or beauty." Keill saw fit seriously to contest only the first point. "Notwithstanding this strange assertion," he says, "I am sure, if we were without these shapeless and ill figur'd old Rocks and Mountains, as he calls them, we should soon find the want of them. It being impossible to subsist or live without them. For setting aside the use they may have in the production of various Plants and Metals, which are useful to mankind, and make a part of the compleat whole, and the Food which they yield to several Animals, which are design'd by Nature to live upon them; *The high hills being a refuge for*

<sup>26</sup> *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, 3 vols., 1845, II, p. 590; III, pp. 466-528. Compare Locke, *Essay on Human Understanding*, bk. IV, ch. VI, sec. 11.

*the wild Goats, and the Rocks for the Conies . . . Without them it is certain we should have no rivers,"*<sup>27</sup> etc.

A similar, but much more influential, statement of this apology was made by William King in *De Origine Mali* (1702), a book known in the original or in its English translation (1729) by most readers of the eighteenth century. In opposition to the ultra-Calvinistic theologians, King held the waste places of the globe, such as mountains and deserts, to be a part of the original scheme of things; in opposition to the atheists, he considered even these disagreeable aspects proofs of the Creating Mind. "God," he says, "has given those parts to the Brutes which were unfit for Man; and that there might be nothing useless, which yet could not be alter'd without detriment to the whole, he has adapted Animals to every Part and Region of it; and since the Habitation could not conveniently be converted into any other form, he provided such Animals as wanted, and were agreeable to the Habitations. Hence Mountains, Woods and Rocks give harbour to wild Beasts, the Sea to Fishes, the earth to Insects."

Archbishop King, however, obviously did not make out a strong case against the atheists, for they would have brushed aside both the habitation and its inhabitants as useless and ugly. By admitting that "the Habitation could not conveniently be converted into any other form," he actually made the Creator a workman subject to human limitations. God seemed to disguise one fault by committing another. King's translator, Edmund Law, from whose Chapter iv I have quoted,<sup>28</sup> attempted to supplement King's reasoning so as to bring it into complete harmony with Cudworth's general thesis. "Our Author's argument here might be convey'd," he thought, "much farther, and the Infinite Wisdom of the Creator Demonstrated, not only from his having made nothing in vain, or useless in *itself*, but also from the distinct and various relations which every thing bears to *others*, and its contribution to the good of the whole." Then follows in Law's note a passage that may be taken as a final statement of the utilitarian argument in defense of mountains. "Thus the Mountains mention'd

<sup>27</sup> *An Examination of Dr. Burnet's Theory of the Earth*, Oxford, 1698, pp. 54-5. Ch. III is devoted to mountains.

<sup>28</sup> William King, *An Essay on the Origin of Evil, Translated, etc.*, by Edmund Law, third ed., 1739.

in the Objection of *Lucretius*, and which many Moderns also have misrepresented as deformities of Nature, have not only their own peculiar Inhabitants, but also afford to other Animals the most commodious harbour and Maintenance, the best Remedies and Retreats. To them we owe the most pleasant Prospects, the most delicious Wines, the most curious Vegetables, the richest and most useful Metals, Minerals, and other fossils; and, what is more than all, a wholesome Air, and the convenience of navigable Rivers and Fountains."

This doctrine of usefulness soon found its way into the works of orthodox English poets, and it is practically the full measure of appreciation shown by the few who were tolerant of mountains during the reign of Anne. For example, John Philips, who found his native hills "not unamiable," was proceeding upon the expressed hypothesis that "naught is useless made"; hence, just as King had defended mountains as places of habitation and refuge for animals, the poet Philips justifies the existence of the "cloud-piercing hill Plinlimmon" because it yields "shrubby browze" to the goats.<sup>29</sup> Yalden's apology is similar.<sup>30</sup> He is consoled for the ugliness of the hills by the consideration that they are filled with precious metal. A still clearer example is the pious Sir Richard Blackmore's *Creation*, in seven books (1712). The avowed purpose of his "endless line" is to refute the atheistic argument of Lucretius and "the Lucretian tribe," especially their objection to the unsightliness and inconvenience due to mountains. In the Preface Blackmore disclaims any attempt at originality. Previously his argument has been stated, he says, in a manner "obscure, dry and disagreeable"; he himself will give it the advantages peculiar to poetry, and adapt it more to the general apprehension and capacity of mankind—an undertaking in which he is encouraged by the belief that "the Epicurean philosophy had not lived so long, nor been so much esteemed, had it not been kept alive and propagated by the famous poem of Lucretius." The gist of Blackmore's opposition to Lucretius is contained in the following passage:

You say "The hills, which high in air arise,  
Harbour in clouds, and mingle with the skies,  
The Earth's dishonour and encumbering load,

<sup>29</sup> *Cyder*, bk. I, 98 ff.

<sup>30</sup> *To Sir Humphrey Mackworth*.

Of many spacious regions man defraud,  
 For beasts and birds of prey a desolate abode."  
 But can the objector no convenience find  
 In mountains, hills, and rocks, which gird and bind  
 The mighty frame, that else would be disjoin'd?  
 Do not those heaps the raging tide restrain,  
 And for the dome afford the marble vein?  
 Does not the river from the mountain flow,  
 And bring down riches to the vale below?  
 See how the torrent rolls the golden sand  
 From the high ridges to the flatter land.  
 The lofty lines abound with endless store  
 Of mineral treasure, and metallic ore;  
 With precious veins of silver, copper, tin,  
 Without how barren, yet how rich within!  
 They bear the pine, the oak and cedar yield,  
 To form the palace, and the navy build.<sup>21</sup>

This pragmatic argument, which contains slight nourishment for poetry, represents the first, or orthodox, stage of rationalism. The poetry written in imitation of it, though only apologetic and of no intrinsic worth, is of some value. Even this attitude was more promising than the earlier hostility to mountains. It served also as a stepping-stone to the poetic appreciation developed by the extreme rationalists, or Deists, who are to be considered next.

## II

The poetic qualities of Deism were developed mainly by the Earl of Shaftesbury, the first English philosopher to realize at all fully the æsthetic possibilities of nature and natural law. His essays began appearing in 1699 and were collected as *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, etc., in 1711. The fullest treatment of nature is contained in *The Moralists: A Philosophical Rhapsody* (1709). Since his conception has had a profound effect upon subsequent literature, both learned and popular, it requires here a somewhat detailed examination.

Shaftesbury's rationalism took the heretical stand that the Deity has written himself out so plainly in the Book of Nature that further revelation would have been superfluous. On the dry

<sup>21</sup> Bk. III, 407-426. This is merely a brief summary of the elaborate treatment already made in bk. I. The same view is expressed in Haller's *Die Alpen* (1729).



dialectics of his thesis he spends comparatively little time. Likewise, although King's utilitarian argument underlies all of Shaftesbury's reasoning, he makes little of it in his discussion. His main purpose is to illustrate in detail the matchless beauty and harmony inherent in all creation. This æsthetic purpose is manifest also in Cudworth, who in turn was indebted to the Platonic *τὸ βέλτιστον*: all that is implied by Cudworth's "plastic nature" as an emanation of the Deity is here fully developed by his pupil.<sup>32</sup> In a spirit that defied the prevailing horror of "enthusiasm" and a style of composition utterly disregarding the model of restraint set up by the prose-writers of his day, Shaftesbury's frequent rhapsodies exhibit every detail of nature as not only useful to some great end, but as supremely beautiful. He is a poet among philosophers. Montesquieu regarded him as one of the four great poets of the world.<sup>33</sup> In the "universal order and coherence of things," he found all he needed to know of God. "All Nature's wonders serve to excite and perfect this idea of their author. 'Tis here he suffers us to see, and even converse with him in a manner suitable to our frailty. How glorious it is to contemplate him in this noblest of his works apparent to us, the system of the bigger world."<sup>34</sup> The "anti-enthusiastic poet" Lucretius<sup>35</sup> stirred his profound contempt; for "'tis impossible," he said, "that such a divine order should be contemplated without ecstasy and rapture, since in the common subjects of science and the liberal arts, whatever is according to just harmony and proportion is so transporting to those who have any knowledge or practice in the kind."<sup>36</sup>

Such passages are scattered throughout his works. The most connected treatment of the subject is to be found in the well-

<sup>32</sup> For Shaftesbury's admiration of Cudworth, see *Characteristics*, ed. J. M. Robertson, 2 vols., New York, 1900 (to which all references below), II, pp. 50, 196, and Letter to Jean Le Clerc, March 6, 1705-6, in *Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen*, ed. Benjamin Rand, London, 1900, p. 352.

<sup>33</sup> *Pensées Diverses*, Œuv. Comp., Paris, 1838, p. 626.

<sup>34</sup> *Characteristics*, II, p. 112.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 175. As a matter of fact, Lucretius was "enthusiastic" in spite of his theory (see J. C. Shairp, *op. cit.*, p. 145).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 279.

known apostrophe to Nature in the *Moralists*, the "enthusiasm" of which is indicated by this paragraph:

O glorious Nature! supremely fair and good! All-loving and all-lovely, all-divine! Whose looks are so becoming and of such infinite grace; whose study brings such wisdom, and whose contemplation such delight; whose every single work affords an ampler scene, and is a nobler spectacle than all which ever art presented! O mighty Nature! wise substitute of Providence! impowered creatress! Or thou impowering Deity, supreme creator! Thee I invoke and thee alone adore. To thee this solitude, this place, these rural meditations are sacred; whilst thus inspired with harmony of thought . . . I sing of Nature's order in created beings, and celebrate the beauties which resolve in thee, the source and principle of all beauty and perfection.<sup>37</sup>

The full significance of such general statements can be understood only by reference to his system as a whole.<sup>38</sup> The "divine order" of which he speaks, anticipating not only the idea but the very phrasing of Wordsworth, is really the basic assumption upon which Shaftesbury erected his entire philosophy. The theological import I have already indicated; harmonious nature is the one record wherein man's reason may discern the character and purposes of God. This adoration of nature is still further increased by the æsthetic and ethical doctrine likewise rooted in his naturalistic theory. Setting aside all moral precepts and the doctrine of future reward and punishment, he held that the Good and the Beautiful are identical, that moral virtue is merely the perfect expression of æsthetic sensibility, and that such perfection is a "harmony of inward numbers" resonating to the perfect harmony of the physical world. The resolution of his system into these component parts makes it clear that the "union and coherence of things" is the sole basis of a philosophic scheme embracing theology, æsthetics, and ethics. This idea of the "sacred order" of nature removed, there would be nothing left of his entire speculation. In his view the worship of nature replaces the necessity of formal creed and is invested with a significance involving the supreme moral and spiritual needs of man. To follow Nature was literally to follow God.

Such a conception obviously does not preclude imagination.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 98.

<sup>38</sup> See Alfred Sternbeck, *Shaftesbury über Natur, Gott und Religion*, Berlin, 1904.

Some of the critics whom I have quoted imply that those who followed the doctrine of reasonableness to a denial of the miraculous surrendered with Christian "faith" their sense of mystery and yearning after the infinite. Instead, the "free thinkers" transferred their imaginative reverence from biblical legends of the supernatural to the equally great, but as they thought more credible, mysteries of the natural universe. Evidence of God was to be found, they claimed, not in the occasional suspension of natural law, but in its continuous and harmonious operation. Whatever the other results may have been, this change in theology meant at least a theoretic gain for the significance of nature. And in spite of their suspicion of the word *mystery* as applied to theology, Deists did not cut themselves off from an imaginative interest in the mysterious processes of nature. It is a habit of critics to speak of the rationalistic conception as if it were diametrically opposed to the romantic. They would have it appear that one school of writers rationalized all physical phenomena and another spiritualized them, the first set treating nature objectively and the second subjectively. Such terms and distinctions are valuable for the purposes of criticism, but they cannot be taken as a basis for rigid historical classification. Shaftesbury is a clear illustration of the fact that the so-called rationalistic and the imaginative conception exist side by side. Rather they are two successive steps of one interpretative process, the rationalistic conclusion serving as a basis of fact for the more imaginative and intensive statement. Although Shaftesbury arrived at his belief through a process of pure reason, to him nature was not merely the "objective and phenomenal" demonstration of the Creator, but was itself an emanation of the Deity; and although he actually accepted the doctrine of a personal God, his phrasing, in passages already cited and others to follow, constantly hovers on the verge of pure pantheism.<sup>39</sup> Nor would anything be gained by labeling the imaginative part of his theory as sentimentalism. A comparison of King and Shaftesbury will lead to a more reliable statement: the very thoroughness with which the Deist applied the doctrine of pure reason cut him off from the traditional creed and left him either to become a downright materialist or else to satisfy his spiritual

<sup>39</sup> This aspect of Deism was developed by John Toland in *Pantheisticon* (1705) — a work very offensive to the orthodox.

nature in a highly poetic conception of the natural universe. In following the latter course he proposed a theory of nature which, I shall attempt to show, anticipated in its details much of what we call romanticism, both in material and in mood.

Theocles, who in Shaftesbury's *Moralists* represents the author himself, does not confine his enthusiasm to mere platitudes about the heavens and the other accepted beauties of nature. At times the praise may run into trite observations justifying Sir Leslie Stephen's phrases "empty declamation" and "old fashioned classical magniloquence."<sup>40</sup> Shaftesbury would have been most extraordinary if he had wholly avoided rhetoric of this kind at a time when Newton's discoveries were still recent and the Deists were using such scientific truths as a telling argument against the dogmatists. But there is much more in his apotheosis of nature. He exulted in phases of the natural world that had never become hackneyed subjects of art, or even subjects at all. Theocles avowed there is not a part of the entire "map of nature" unworthy of man's reverence. To establish his thesis, he descended from his contemplation of the heavens and conducted his pupil "through different climates, from pole to pole, and from the frigid to the torrid zone."<sup>41</sup>

The least enthusiastic part of this survey is the apology for the frozen North. Even here, however, Shaftesbury was an innovator. The description itself anticipates the work of the "Winter Poets," who arose about sixteen years later, and any defence of the rigors of winter was at the time of Shaftesbury's writing (1709) a catholic note hardly to be found in all the range of English literature.<sup>42</sup> The polar regions are, he admitted, "the darkest and most imperfect parts of our map"; but even here are found "the kind compensating gifts of heaven" and such strangeness of life as to force man "humbly to adore the greater composer."

In his comment upon the deserts of the earth there is a close approximation to the romantic affection for inanimate nature and also the lower animals. Of the places, he says: "All ghastly and hideous as they appear, they want not their peculiar beauties. The

<sup>40</sup> *History of English Thought*, 2 vols., 1902, II, pp. 437-8.

<sup>41</sup> *Characteristics*, II, pp. 119-20.

<sup>42</sup> See Veitch, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-8; Miss Reynolds, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19, and notes.

wildness pleases. We seem to live alone with Nature. We view her in her inmost recesses, and contemplate her with more delight in these original wilds than in the artificial labyrinths and feigned wildernesses of the palace."<sup>43</sup> It follows of necessity that this imaginative sympathy embraces all animal life as one part of the finely graduated system of nature. In this respect Shaftesbury was falling in with a tendency of the age to repudiate the Cartesian doctrine that animals are mere machines. In other essays he takes issue with Descartes,<sup>44</sup> condemns baitings and other forms of cruelty to animals,<sup>45</sup> and praises the humanitarian views in the essays of Montaigne.<sup>46</sup> In his application of this benevolent doctrine to the creatures of the desert he strikes a note of sympathy suggestive of Coleridge's moral in *The Ancient Mariner*. "The objects of the place," he declares, "the scaly serpents, the savage beasts, and poisonous insects, how terrible soever, or how contrary to human nature, are beauteous in themselves, and fit to raise our thoughts in admiration of that divine wisdom, so far superior to our short views."<sup>47</sup>

Still more significant is his attitude towards mountains. To many writers in his day and long afterwards they were "great ruins, the result of sin"; and at best they were subjects for apology. Theocles seeks the mountain top in the dawning, for he thinks the *genius loci* will "make us feel Divinity present in these solemn places of retreat."<sup>48</sup> Mountains are mentioned for repeated praise and are given the last word in the author's fervid apostrophe to all Nature. The very dangers of dizzy heights, sharp crags, and impending ledges are alluring. Even thoughtless men, "seized with the newness of such objects," are awakened from their moral lethargy. Such places may be horrible, but the horror is blended with a strange, religious pleasure. The vague melancholy of the later romanticist is clearly detected in the passage that follows:

But, here, midway the mountain, a spacious border of thick wood harbours our wearied travellers, who are now come among the ever green and lofty pines, the firs, and noble cedars, whose towering heads seem endless in the sky, the rest of the trees appearing only as shrubs beside them. And

<sup>43</sup> *Characteristics*, II, p. 122.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp. 331-2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, II, pp. 287, 315-6.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 122.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, II, pp. 120-1, 176.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 9.

here a different horror seizes our sheltered travellers, when they see the day diminished by the deep shades of the vast wood, which, closing thick above, spreads darkness and eternal night below. The faint and gloomy light looks horrid<sup>\*</sup> as the shade itself; and the profound stillness of these places imposes silence upon men, struck with the hoarse echoings of every sound within the spacious caverns of the wood. Here space astonishes; silence itself seems pregnant, whilst an unknown force works on the mind, and dubious objects move the wakeful sense. *Mysterious voices are either heard or fancied, and various forms of deity seem to present themselves and appear more manifest in these sacred silvan scenes, such as of old gave rise to temples, and favoured the religion of the ancient world. Even we ourselves, who in plain characters may read divinity from so many bright parts of the earth, choose rather these obscurer places to spell out that mysterious being, which to our weak eyes appears at best under a veil of cloud.*"<sup>\*\*</sup>

Though published in 1709, do these passages not contain at least a hint of what Pater calls "an intimate consciousness of the expression of natural things, which weighs, listens, penetrates, where the earlier mind passed roughly by"? Here there is, to be sure, no finely-wrought description. But this is not to be expected: Shaftesbury was writing as a philosopher, and was therefore confined to general statement. It is the spirit of his interpretation that counts. It would be difficult—I think impossible—to find in any literature of his day utterances so nearly akin to the mood of Wordsworth. Instead of the humanistic love of solitude as merely a retreat favorable to examination and discipline of self, one finds much more frequently in Shaftesbury an express statement of Nature's spiritual power over man. Instead of being objects of hatred, mountains are the special dwelling place of the Great Spirit.

How far Shaftesbury's love of mountains had out-distanced the literary habits of his time can be clearly demonstrated. A more liberal conception was beginning, as I have shown, to creep into popular literature, but only in an apologetic form. Addison's appreciation was limited to a polite tolerance. "Mount Pausilypo makes," he says, "a beautiful prospect to those who pass by it"; "In sailing around Caprea we were entertained with many rude prospects of rocks and precipices," and the journey over the Ap-

<sup>\*</sup> It has frequently been pointed out that the word *horrid* in eighteenth century literature is not derogatory.

<sup>\*\*</sup> *Characteristics*, II, pp. 123-4. The italics are mine.

penines was "very agreeably relieved by the variety of scenes we passed through."<sup>51</sup> Since Wordsworth proclaimed Lady Winchilsea's merit in 1815, she has been regarded as the one poet of Queen Anne's reign who reflected the spirit of nature. Her published work was contemporaneous with that of Shaftesbury. Imaginative as some of her description is, and far removed from the literary cant of the day, her appreciation is exceedingly limited in range. Her latest editor admits that Lady Winchilsea's imagination could not wholly escape the conventional impression of the sea, the storm, and the mountain.<sup>52</sup> To her, mountains meant something more than "huge, monstrous *excrescences* of nature"; but her tribute to them never went beyond the stilted apostrophe, "Ye native altars of the Earth." Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, published two years after the *Moralists*, makes only a doubtful concession:

In prospects thus, some objects please our eyes,  
Which out of nature's common order rise,  
The shapeless rock, or hanging precipice.

The following passage from John Philips's *Cyder* (1708), Miss Reynolds considers "perhaps the earliest expression in the eighteenth century of that pleasure in high hills and wide prospects that were so marked a characteristic of later poetry."<sup>53</sup>

Nor are the hills unamiable, whose tops  
To heaven aspire, affording prospects sweet  
To human ken.

The passage is unusual in popular literature; but, compared with the rhapsodies in the *Moralists*, the tribute is faint. The striking fact is that neither this nor any of the other passages cited from this period contains the spirit of actual worship. This is absent also from Lady Mary's praise of the Alps in 1716. She found the banks of the Danube merely picturesque — "charmingly diversified with woods, rocks, mountains covered with vines," etc.<sup>54</sup> Among the stock examples usually quoted we do not come across a spirit of "devout ecstasy" similar to Shaftesbury's until we reach

<sup>51</sup> *Remarks on Several parts of Italy* (written 1705). Cited by Dr. Havens, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

<sup>52</sup> *The Poems of the Countess of Winchilsea*, ed. Myra Reynolds, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1903, pp. 122-123.

<sup>53</sup> *Treatment of Nature*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>54</sup> *Letters and Works*, ed. Lord Wharnccliffe, I, p. 205.

Gray's notes on the Alps. His letter to Richard West, November 16, 1739, contains this comment: "Not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry. There are certain scenes that would awe an atheist into belief, without the help of other argument. One need not have a very fantastic imagination, to see spirits there at noonday."<sup>55</sup> This is clearly, I think, the strongest statement of Gray's impression. And yet this same theistic argument and poetical belief in mountain spirits had been anticipated thirty years earlier by one of the "rationalistic, prosaic, skeptical philosophers."

Shaftesbury himself realized that he was a pioneer. There is a prophetic note in the tribute which he has Philocles, the pupil, pay to his master, Theocles, the unfashionable worshipper of wild nature in the reign of Queen Anne: "Your genius, the genius of the place, and the Great Genius have at last prevailed. I shall no longer resist the passion growing in me for things of a natural kind, where neither art nor the conceit or caprice of man has spoiled their genuine order by breaking in upon that primitive state. Even the rude rocks, the mossy caverns, the irregular unwrought grottos and broken falls of water, with all the horrid graces of the wilderness itself, as representing Nature more, will be the more engaging, and appear with a magnificence beyond the formal mockery of princely gardens."<sup>56</sup> Philocles adds very pertinently, "But tell me, I entreat you, how comes it that, excepting a few philosophers of your sort, the only people who are enamoured in this way, and seek the woods, the rivers, or seashores, are your poor vulgar lovers?"<sup>57</sup> The reply of Theocles conveys in a few words an arraignment of Queen Anne taste that meets the situation squarely. "All those who are deep in this romantic way," he laments, "are looked upon, you know, as a people either plainly out of their wits, or overrun with melancholy or enthusiasm."<sup>58</sup> Shaftesbury was not unaware that he was promulgating an æsthetic view at variance with the literary creed of his time; he realized that as a genuine lover of the solitudes and mysteries of uncultivated nature he was guilty of a heresy in literature comparable to his heretical attitude towards theology, ethics, and "enthusi-

<sup>55</sup> *The Letters of Thomas Gray*, ed. D. C. Tovey, I, p. 44.

<sup>56</sup> *Characteristics*, II, p. 125.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*



asm." To neglect him in a treatment of popular literature is wrongly to assume that his ideas were not adopted by popular writers, and to pit him against the romanticists is to pervert the actual facts.

Shaftesbury himself, however, was but a part of a general movement. His phrase "excepting a few philosophers of your sort" conveys a shrewd judgment of the whole matter considered historically. The reference is to the Deists, and the implication is sound. When once speculation had disentangled itself from the old theological creed that was suspicious of anything in its natural state, and had also disclaimed the doctrine of mere chance as a solution of life, it was committed to a theory of the universe leading straight to a love of all things natural for their intrinsic beauty. Another name for Deism, one used much more frequently at that time, was the Religion of Nature. It was not a misnomer. Primarily as the result of Deistical theory, all forms of nature — physical and moral — were given a more honorable place in European thought. Both King and Shaftesbury were greatly indebted to Cudworth's "plastic nature." Allowance made for personal accomplishments, such as style, Shaftesbury may be said to have surpassed King because his disavowal of the orthodox view was thorough, whereas King attempted to effect a compromise between natural and special revelation. They are typical of all contemporary philosophy. Rationalism as a whole was drifting away from the stern Calvinistic conception of God, man, and the world; but it was left to the heretical Deists to develop the doctrine of "natural revelation" into a form suitable for the purpose of poetry.

In Shaftesbury's essays this naturalistic philosophy reached the high-water mark in English speculation of the eighteenth century, and from him most of the popular writers drew. None of the other Deistic philosophers possessed the literary skill to rival him; their treatment of nature is at best an echo of his. Besides, most of them were fully occupied with the bitter controversy over fundamental points of theology, which Shaftesbury had assumed as a starting-point. Some, like his avowed champion Francis Hutcheson, were concerned primarily with the ethical doctrine of the *Characteristics*. The only other philosopher who calls for mention here is the orthodox Berkeley. He was violently opposed to Shaftesbury on various grounds, but his conception of nature, as intimated in *Alciphron*, Dialogue IV (1732), and *Siris* (1744), is drawn

largely from Cudworth and the pagan philosophers whom both Cudworth and Shaftesbury imitated. Berkeley's example apparently had little or no effect on popular literature; it is important here only as an indication of the compromise gradually accepted by the orthodox when the controversy between the Church and the Deists began to subside.<sup>59</sup> A comparison of King and Berkeley would demonstrate to what extent the Christians, who for a time had been seriously discomfited by the extreme argument of natural revelation, were finally able to appropriate its most poetic results. Berkeley himself, however, did not develop this part of his philosophy — "the language or discourse of nature" — until most of his ideas had begun to appear in popular literature through poetical imitation of Deism.

Just as Blackmore and his like borrowed from the orthodox phase of rationalism, other English poets daringly appropriated the radical conclusions of the "free thinkers." In this way was derived the ethical and spiritual valuation of nature with which we are familiar in modern poetry, and which is far more distinctive of romanticism than is mere delineative description. That the full poetic possibilities of such a creed should be realized at once in popular literature was not to be expected; the new philosophy made its way gradually as it had done in learned writings. The parallel is seen also in that it is not wholly divorced from the unpoetic argument of utility. The belief in Nature's usefulness always underlies the more artistic conception, and, especially in the early stages of poetical treatment, is constantly cropping out. Strict classification of individual poems is, therefore, impracticable. The two ideas — utility and beauty — are frequently found side by side. Also in poetry as well as formal speculation, Nature may be presented both as a purely external and objective demonstration and as a symbol or even a part of the Deity. The various elements are confusingly intermingled. The full artistic possibilities were to be realized only after a long process of development during which the more poetic ideas were gradually abstracted and emphasized; but even from the first there are discernible certain elements of interpretation that foreshadow the perfected creed of Wordsworth.

<sup>59</sup> "Berkeley's Influence on Popular Literature: A Review of a Review," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, xiv, 3 (July, 1915).

The first signs of the Deistic view in popular literature of the eighteenth century are to be found in the work of Henry Needler (1690-1718).<sup>60</sup> Needler's productions have no intrinsic merit. Much of his philosophy also is confined within the safe limits of orthodox belief. Several of his poems are concerned with a set of theological ideas advocated by all the rationalists. In *A Vernal Hymn in Praise of the Creator*, he versifies the old attack on the atomic theory of "*Chance or Parent-Nature.*" *A Poem in Blank Verse, Proving the Being of a God From the Works of Creation. And Some Brief Remarks on the Folly of Discontent* follows the lead of rationalism in general very closely, as will be seen from this extract:

For what but an Eternal Mind, endu'd  
With utmost Reach of Wisdom exquisite,  
In Goodness and in Power praeeminent,  
Cou'd raise this stately pile; and, all its Parts,  
So visibly, in Order due, dispose;  
Cou'd spread this spacious Canopy, adorn'd  
With thousand glowing stars, that seem to shine  
With emulating lustre, and display  
Their bright Nocturnal Scene; cou'd clothe this Earth  
With grass; with forest crown the mountain-tops;  
With rivers grand, and murm'ring rivulets,  
Refresh the thirsty fields; that so the Whole  
To man a habitation might afford  
Commodious and delightful? How ingrate,  
And blind the Atheist! who denies the Pow'r  
Indulgent, that has made him, and bestow'd  
So many blessings on him undeserv'd!

To most of the ideas in these pieces the pious Sir Richard could have subscribed; but elsewhere Needler leans to a heresy which Blackmore had mentioned only for reprobation. And the difference between these two poets on this point serves admirably to define the new line of thought in popular literature due to the additional influence of Deism.

Blackmore had taken occasion to mark the boundary beyond which the theological argument from nature must not go. Pantheistic worship is as dangerous, he thought, as atheism. That he was here glancing at Shaftesbury is not improbable, especially since

<sup>60</sup> Apparently the date of the first ed. of his works is not known. The second came out in 1728.

the Preface to *Creation* contains a long passage clearly aimed at *Wit and Humour*; but he referred the obnoxious doctrine of the pantheists to Spinoza and derisively summed it up as follows:

The lucid orbs, the earth, the air, the main,  
With every different being they contain,  
Are one prodigious aggregated God,  
Of whom each sand is part, each stone and clod;  
Supreme perfections in each insect shine,  
Each shrub is sacred, and each weed divine.<sup>41</sup>

By condemning this very theory, however, Blackmore precludes all that is genuinely poetic in this whole field of speculation. The unmodified utilitarian view is too drily pragmatic for the purposes of art. The only justification of it is that for some of the other writers it served as a stepping-stone to the more æsthetic view which Blackmore deplored as heresy. Apparently the first of these was Needler, who derived his ideas from the *Characteristics*.

In a "Letter to Dr. Duncombe," dated December 3, 1711 (the year of the collected *Characteristics*), Needler thanked his correspondent for the "Philosophical Meditations of my Lord Shaftesbury" and composed a prose rhapsody in imitation of Shaftesbury's apostrophe. Beginning "Hail Sacred Solitude and Silence," Needler's thin song glorifies all Nature as a "Fair Copy of the Divine Ideas, and Image of the Deity!" The conclusion of the piece strikes a note which within a few years was to become general: "How vast a System then is the Universe! Profuse Beneficence! Luxuriant Bounty! . . . Thou minglest Thyself (as it were) with the Matter of the World; thy ever-active and Omniscient Power inspires the Whole; infusing Life and Motion into all its Parts." Although this passage contains a mere hint of Cudworth's "plastic nature" and the bold assumptions erected by Shaftesbury upon it, Needler's imitation, if published during the reign of Anne, would probably account for some of the few facts we have concerning his life. Cudworth's book was a storehouse for the "free thinkers," and therefore condemned by the orthodox, and Shaftesbury was more than once in danger of prosecution.<sup>42</sup> Needler's imitation of one or both seems to have brought him into similar disfavor. Apparently there are no copies of his first edi-

<sup>41</sup> Bk. III, 806-11.

<sup>42</sup> See *Regimen*, cited above, pp. 369, 371, 384, 400-2, 420-1.

tion, he committed suicide, and Duncombe, the editor of his second edition (1728), was suspiciously anxious to vindicate the "extreme piety" of the poet.<sup>63</sup> His offense was aggravated by a prose essay *On the Beauty of the Universe*, where these opinions are set forth more elaborately. In the edition of 1728, published when the Church was no longer able to enforce her coercive policy, the publisher inserted an Advertisement that may have had the effect of stimulating some of the similar productions to be examined later: "The Essay on the Beauty of the Universe, tho' very just and rational, is but a sketch (as Mr. Needler himself owns) . . . I wish it may incite some able hand to treat more amply so useful and entertaining a Subject."

After reading Shaftesbury and Needler one is disposed to question the historical importance assigned by Miss Reynolds to Parnell's *Hymn to Contentment* (1722), which falls here chronologically. The following passage, praising the "Great Source of Nature," is typical:

The sun, that walks his airy way,  
To light the world, and give the Day;  
The moon, that shines with borrowed light;  
The stars, that gild the gloomy night;  
The seas, that roll unnumber'd waves;  
The wood, that spreads its shady leaves;  
The field, whose ears conceal the grain,  
The yellow treasure of the plain;—  
All of these, and all I see,  
Should be sung, and sung by me:  
They speak their Maker as they can,  
But want, and ask, the tongue of man.

The poem as a whole Miss Reynolds finds "indeed remarkable": "for spirituality and insight, for what has well been called 'a sense of the thing behind the thing,' it was many years before it was paralleled."<sup>64</sup> In the list given by her it is exceptional. But does it contain any more "insight" than is to be found in the philosophy of Shaftesbury or in the works of Needler? The theory proposed is less bold and poetic than Needler's. These two writers died the same year (1718); Needler's first edition appeared before his death; and Parnell's poem was first published, by Pope,

<sup>63</sup> See Preface to second edition.

<sup>64</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 71.

in 1722. This chronology does not argue that Parnell ever heard of Needler; but it shows that Parnell's view was not anomalous in popular literature, and suggests that he himself was probably influenced by the philosophy expressly acknowledged by the more obscure poet. Parnell's ignorance of such speculative doctrine can hardly be supposed. It is at least probable that he found the story of *The Hermit* in the works of the Cambridge Platonist Henry More; his vicarage of Finglass was bestowed upon him by Archbishop King; and his association with Pope and other "free-thinkers" renders it likely that he was not unacquainted with some of the later and less orthodox rationalists.

It was not until after 1725, however, that these tendencies exhibited by Needler and Parnell became widely prevalent in English poetry. There then arose a philosophical school of writers most of whom were avowed Deists actuated by a well-defined theory. Their conception of nature is presented most fully in Thomson's *Seasons* (1726-30), Henry Baker's *The Universe* (1727), Henry Needler's works (second edition 1728), Henry Brooke's *Universal Beauty* (1728, 1735), Pope's *Essay on Man* (1732-4), Mark Akenside's *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1744, revised edition 1757), John Gilbert Cooper's *The Power of Harmony* (1745), and James Harris's *Concord* (1751). Traces of it are to be found in much other poetry of the time, notably in the anonymous poems *On Design and Beauty* (1734), *Order* (1737), *Nature, A Poem* (1747), and *Poetic Essays, on Nature, Men and Morals* (1750), these being inferior imitations of better-known work. Collectively this body of verse represents a wide range of merit and considerable variation in details, but it is all inspired by the worship of cosmic nature as a unified and unexceptionably beautiful whole, the revelation of God to man. My contention is: first, that it sprang directly from Deistic speculation; secondly, that it forms a connecting-link between the formal theorists and the later poets usually designated as romanticists.

That this entire school was drawing inspiration directly from the earlier Deists I have argued in another article,<sup>65</sup> where I have discussed the same set of writers and considered also why Deistic belief was not popularized until late in the reign of George I. My

<sup>65</sup> "Shaftesbury and the Ethical Poets in England, 1700-1760," *P. M. L. A.*, xxxi, 2 (June, 1916).

purpose there was to show that the popular ethical theme of "benevolence" in poetry of the second quarter of the century was due mainly to the widespread imitation of the *Characteristics*, at first by Deists only and later by poets in general. The same evidence is applicable in the present case. That those who versified Shaftesbury's theory of natural goodness should have admitted his reverence for external nature was an absolute necessity. None of the ethical poets who imitated him could have disregarded this phase of his teaching, for it is the basic principle of his entire system. The relative emphasis on the physical and the moral aspects varied with individual writers. Needler, his first avowed follower, and Herder, apparently the last, were interested most in the praise of natural objects. Other poets followed the example of the philosopher Hutcheson in putting the main emphasis upon ethics. But in all instances both phases are represented to some extent.

The evidence adduced in the earlier article includes the praise of Shaftesbury's style and philosophy by English and Continental writers, internal marks of resemblance, the testimony of contemporary critics, and the acknowledgment of the imitators themselves. I will here merely summarize that part of the evidence needed for the present purpose.<sup>66</sup> Among those who acknowledged their indebtedness to Shaftesbury are Thomson, Akenside, and John Gilbert Cooper. Thomson refers only to the ethical doctrine of the *Characteristics*, but his imitation of Shaftesbury's scheme of nature is not to be questioned. The underlying assumptions of the two writers are identical, each endeavoring to interpret the "harmonious whole" recorded in the Book of Nature. The Deistic tendency of the *Hymn* is so obvious that Lyttelton tried to screen Thomson's memory by omitting it from the collected edition of his works, and this part of Thomson's indebtedness is now pretty generally recognized. Herder thought the best notes of Thomson's muse had been caught from those of Theocles; a comparison of the *Moralists*, the *Hymn*, and Herder's own *Naturhymnus von Shaftesburi* (1800) will afford convincing proof that he was right. It is not improbable indeed that Thomson derived a hint for the entire framework of the *Seasons* from Theocles' general survey of the map of nature "through different climates, from pole to pole, and from the frigid

<sup>66</sup> References given in the article above are not repeated.

to the torrid zone."<sup>67</sup> In that part of *Winter* describing the polar region,<sup>68</sup> though some of the details are based on Maupertuis,<sup>69</sup> there are resemblances also to Shaftesbury's description of the frozen North, especially in Thomson's concluding moral.<sup>70</sup> Aken-side's imitation of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson is expressly acknowledged in the notes appended to *The Pleasures of the Imagination* by the author himself and commented on by several of his contemporaries.<sup>71</sup> He differs from the other poets of the Deistic school, except Cooper, in that he undertook to versify almost the entire *corpus* of Shaftesbury's speculation. He included, for example, the doctrine that the perfect harmony of Nature is the only revelation of the Deity required by a reasonable creature, a spirited attack on orthodox superstition, a defense of ridicule as a legitimate weapon in religious debate, and the æsthetic identification of the Good and the Beautiful. Like Akenside, Cooper refers to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson as his models. Harris, the author of *Concord*, was a nephew of Shaftesbury, to whom he had previously dedicated one of his works. Although Shaftesbury is not referred to in *Concord*, long sections of the poem are little more than transcripts from the *Characteristics*. The annotated editions of Pope's *Essay*, especially Elwin's and Mark Pattison's, prove unmistakably that he derived his interpretation of Nature from Shaftesbury and also Cudworth and King, as well as from Bolingbroke's instructions. J. M. Robertson considers the *Essay* "in large part pure Shaftesbury filtered through Bolingbroke." Brooke's source cannot be asserted so positively, but his poem is to be classed with the *Essay*. The Deism of the two poems is of the same tone; Pope passed judgment on *Universal Beauty* before it was published; and Book V, line 60 of Brooke's poem (1735) pays a tribute to Pope's. Baker's *The Universe* contains one passage evidently based on King's *De Origine Mali*,<sup>72</sup> and there are various resemblances to Shaftesbury.

<sup>67</sup> See above, p. 261.

<sup>68</sup> See Author's notes.

<sup>69</sup> Ll. 886 ff.

<sup>70</sup> Ll. 1008-23.

<sup>71</sup> For modern critics also, see Edmund Gosse, *A History of Eighteenth Century Literature*, 1891, p. 311; Sir Leslie Stephen, *A History of English Thought*, 1902, II, p. 365; W. J. Courthope, *A History of English Poetry*, 1905, v, pp. 317-8.

<sup>72</sup> See King's *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, tr. by Edmund Law, third ed., 1739, p. 216.



These separate facts taken collectively mean that this whole body of versified philosophy was derived to some extent from Cudworth and King, but chiefly from the extreme doctrine and more engaging statement of Shaftesbury. It remains to be considered, then, what new elements this imitation contributed to the treatment of nature in poetry, and to what extent the details of this new conception anticipated the work of the so-called romanticists.

In the first place, interest in nature was greatly stimulated by the doctrine of the identity of Truth and Beauty. Through it æsthetic appreciation in general was made the distinguishing trait of the eighteenth-century gentleman. Not to be sensible of beauty was to be wanting in the chief article of the new and fashionable religion; and since the beauty of nature was the supreme beauty within man's experience, indifference to it was a mark of special depravity. In the poetry of Thomson there is no express statement that the Good and the Beautiful are one, but apparently the belief is in the background of Thomson's verse. Akenside states the doctrine in set terms. On the basis of his

For Truth and Good are one;  
And Beauty dwells in them, and they in her,

Gosse called him "a sort of frozen Keats,"<sup>73</sup> and Miss Reynolds credited him with being "the first one to emphasize the platonic doctrine of the identity of truth and beauty."<sup>74</sup> Neither insisted, however, that this anticipation of Keats was a matter of mere imitation. Akenside himself refers his æsthetic notion to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson.<sup>75</sup> It runs throughout the *Characteristics*. The following statement is typical: "And thus, after all, the most natural beauty in the world is honesty and moral truth. For all beauty is truth."<sup>76</sup> The English origin of the doctrine was regularly ascribed to Shaftesbury, especially by his orthodox opponents. Quoting for the purpose of attack, John Balguy wrote (1730): "*All Beauty is Truth* says the penetrating author of the *Characteristics*."<sup>77</sup> Emphasis is to be placed, not only on Shaftesbury's responsibility for the English acceptance of this doctrine, but also on the fact that Akenside's poetical statement is not the solitary

<sup>73</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 312.

<sup>74</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>75</sup> Author's note, bk. I, 374.

<sup>76</sup> *Characteristics*, I, p. 94.

<sup>77</sup> *Divine Rectitude*, 1730, p. 19.

anticipation of Keats that some would have us think. The year after his poem appeared, Cooper's *The Power of Harmony* (1745), another imitation of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, developed the same idea in a much more elaborated form than Akenside's statement of it.<sup>78</sup> It is an organic part also of James Harris's *Concord* (1751), and is implied, if not expressed, by most of the poets under consideration.

In the actual treatment of nature, the first service of the Deistic poets was to popularize Shaftesbury's view that every aspect of nature is worthy of man's reverence. In some instances this plea rests largely on the orthodox argument of mere utility. Thomson challenges the atheists much as Blackmore had done:

Let no presuming impious railer tax  
Creative Wisdom, as if aught was formed  
In vain, or not for admirable ends.<sup>79</sup>

Baker gives this argument a more detailed application:

Here pause, and wonder!—then reflect again.  
Almighty Wisdom nothing makes in vain:  
The smallest Fly, the meanest Weed we find,  
From its Creation had some use assign'd,  
Essential to its Being, still the same,  
Co-equal, co-existent with its Frame.

In the passage that follows, Thomson's interpretation becomes less prosaic. He would spend the "winter glooms," he says, with "friends of pliant soul,"

With them would search, if nature's boundless frame  
Was call'd late-rising from the void of night,  
Or sprung eternal from the Eternal Mind;  
Its life, its law, its progress, and its end.  
Hence larger prospects of the beauteous whole  
Would, gradual, open on our opening minds;  
And each diffusive harmony unite  
In full perfection to the astonish'd eye.<sup>80</sup>

To Brooke, every process of nature is a powerful revelation of the Deity:

<sup>78</sup> Bk. II, 330-343. In addition to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, whom the author had already cited as his principal sources among the moderns, he here included in a special note Plato's *Dialogues*, Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, and the French *Traité du Beau*.

<sup>79</sup> *Summer*, 318-320.

<sup>80</sup> *Winter*, 575-582.

Like Nature's law no eloquence persuades,  
 The mute harangue our ev'ry sense invades;  
 Th' apparent precepts of the Eternal Will,  
 His ev'ry work, and ev'ry object fill;  
 Round with our eyes his revelation wheels,  
 Our ev'ry touch his demonstration feels.<sup>81</sup>

Book II of Cooper's *The Power of Harmony* covers every phase of the argument which I have discussed in the treatment of the philosophers, including an attack on both the traditional view of the Calvinists and the atomic hypothesis. According to Cooper, when man is rightly attuned, he

Looks thro' all  
 The plan of Nature with congenial love,  
 Where the great social link of mutual aid  
 Through ev'ry being twines; where all conspire  
 To form one system of eternal good,

and thus man learns to love and commune with all nature—from "the effulgent sun" to "the pale glow-worm in the midnight shade."<sup>82</sup>

Frequently the poetical form of this reverence is, like Shaftesbury's, virtually pantheistic. In Thomson we find

O Nature! all-sufficient! over all!<sup>83</sup>

Of the seasons, he says:

These, as they change, Almighty Father, these  
 Are but the varied God. The rolling year  
 Is full of Thee.<sup>84</sup>

The following apostrophe scarcely distinguishes between the Creator and His work:

Inspiring God! who, boundless spirit all,  
 And unremitting energy, pervades,  
 Adjusts, sustains, and agitates the whole.  
 He, ceaseless, works alone, and yet alone  
 Seems not to work; with such perfection framed  
 Is this complex, stupendous scheme of things.  
 But, though concealed, to every purer eye  
 The informing Author in His works appears.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Bk. v, 23-28. For his argument against the atheists, see bk. II, 271-333, and the Author's long note on 271.

<sup>82</sup> Bk. II, 321-329.

<sup>83</sup> *Autumn*, 1351.

<sup>84</sup> *Hymn*.

<sup>85</sup> *Spring*, 853-860.

Brooke's constant manner of address is

Nature, bright effluence of the One Supreme!<sup>86</sup>

Pope's pantheism in the following well-known passage was one of the chief causes of Crousaz's attack:

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,  
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;  
That, changed through all, and yet in all the same  
Great in the earth, as in the etherial frame  
Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,  
Glowes in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,  
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,  
Spreads undivided, operates unspent.<sup>87</sup>  
Science like this, important and Divine,  
The good man offers, *Reason*, at thy shrine;  
Sees *Thee, God, Nature* (well explain'd) the same;  
Not chang'd when thought on, varying but in name.

To give a practical application of this belief that the Deity is diffused throughout creation, Cooper devotes an entire book of his poem to "The Harmony of Nature" in its immediate effect upon the moral and spiritual life of man.<sup>88</sup> Probably, however, the most striking single statement of the new poetic creed is in the concluding lines of Akenside's *The Pleasures of the Imagination*:

Thus the men  
Whom Nature's works can charm, with God himself  
Hold converse; grow familiar, day by day,  
With his conceptions, act upon his plan,  
And form to his, the relish of their souls.<sup>89</sup>

This paganistic assumption that Nature, when properly understood, is a complete revelation of the Creator is the basis upon which the modern romantic worship of nature arose. Even those early poets who did no more than proclaim this belief in dry terms of exposition were helping to popularize a theory that underlies

<sup>86</sup> *Universal Beauty*, bk. II, 261.

<sup>87</sup> *Essay on Man*, Ep. I, Sec. IX. In defending the passage, Warburton denies that Pope is a Spinozist, but admits his pantheism. *An Essay on Reason* (1735), by Pope's friend Walter Harte, affords an interesting parallel, although his poem was supposed to be thoroughly orthodox:

<sup>88</sup> *The Power of Harmony*, bk. II.

<sup>89</sup> Compare *The Prospect. A Poem*, 1735, published in *Gent. Mag.*, vol. XIII, p. 608, November, 1743.

the best poetry of Wordsworth, his American imitator Bryant, Byron, and Shelley. Dr. Durham apparently regards defection from Christianity to Deism in the Augustan period as an inevitable loss of poetic vigor. I take the opposite view. There is more than a verbal connection between the Religion of Nature and the Poetry of Nature. The slightest exaggeration converts this new philosophic interpretation into the vague pantheism that manifests itself constantly in such poets as Wordsworth. Though probably none of the philosophers or poets actually substituted pantheism for a belief in a personal God, the poetical tendency to do so appears in Shaftesbury and his imitators just as it does in their successors. So far as mere thought is concerned, Wordsworth's *The Tables Turned* (1798), *Lines Written in Early Spring* (1798), and *Influence of Natural Objects* (1809) had been anticipated more or less exactly by all these philosophical poets. The following passage from *Tintern Abbey* (1798), often cited as typical of a new attitude, merely repeats what Cudworth meant by the "plastic life of nature" and what Shaftesbury and his poetical followers labored to express in detail:

And I have felt  
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
 Of something far more deeply interfused,  
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
 A motion and a spirit, that impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 And rolls through all things.

When Deistic poets had thus envisaged all nature, they necessarily followed Shaftesbury in his insistence that the "horrid" aspects of the world, as well as the softer features, are to be revered as parts of the divine harmony. They naturally preferred the uncultivated portions of the earth, where the evidence of the Creator is least obscured by the hand of art. Such appreciation is very different from the cautious apology used by the orthodox writers. If the Deistic poets had done no more than bring such "deformities" as deserts, storms, and mountains into special favor, they would have made a vast contribution to succeeding poetry. This new attitude is discernible even in Needler; among the proofs of the divine regimen he includes the forest-crowned

mountains as spectacles of beauty.<sup>90</sup> Brooke explains the "all-teeming wed-lock" of nature as comprising

The lowly sweetness of the flowry vale,  
The mount elate that rises in delight,  
The flying lawns that wanton from the sight,  
The florid theatres, romantic scenes,  
The steepy mountains, and luxurious plains,  
Delicious regions.<sup>91</sup>

*The Pleasures of the Imagination* includes within "the goodly frame" of nature the "sable clouds," the "flying storm," and the mountains.<sup>92</sup> Following Shaftesbury's identification of taste and morality, Cooper says the tasteful mind enjoys

Alike the complicated charms which glow  
Thro' the wide landscape, where enamell'd meads,  
Unfruitful rocks, brown woods, and glittering streams,  
The daisy-laughing lawns, the verdant plains,  
And hanging mountains, strike at once the sight  
With varied pleasure.<sup>93</sup>

Elsewhere, after dwelling on the charms of the soft and agreeable aspects, he adds:

Now change the scene,  
Nor less admire those things which view'd apart  
Uncouth appear, or horrid; ridges black  
Of shagged rocks, which hang tremendous o'er  
Some barren heath; the congregated clouds  
Which spread their sable skirts, and wait the wind  
To burst th' embosom'd storm; a leafless wood,  
A mould'ring ruin, lightning-blasted fields,  
Nay, e'en the seat where Desolation reigns  
In brownest horror, by familiar thought  
Connected to this universal frame,  
With equal beauty charms the tasteful soul,  
As the gold landscape of the happy isles  
Crown'd with Hesperian fruit; for Nature form'd  
One plan entire, and made each sep'rate scene  
Co-op'rate with the gen'ral force of all  
In that harmonious contrast.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Quoted above, p. 268.

<sup>91</sup> *Universal Beauty*, bk. I, 133-9.

<sup>92</sup> Bk. II, 274 is not really an exception.

<sup>93</sup> Bk. II, 312-321.

<sup>94</sup> Bk. II, 124-140.

This trait is particularly striking in the poetry of Thomson. In common with Shaftesbury, he liked especially to study the "obscure places of nature"—the gloom, the solitude, the melancholy remoteness of desert and mountain. Mountains appear throughout the *Seasons*, and in spite of Miss Reynolds's remark that "towards mountains and the sea Thomson held almost the traditional attitude,"<sup>85</sup> they are usually invested either with solitary grandeur or with a religious significance. I venture the assertion that by no English poet before Thomson are mountains referred to so often and so affectionately. In a spring landscape,

the Cambrian mountains, like far clouds  
That skirt the blue horizon, dusky rise.<sup>86</sup>

In summer

The dripping rock, the mountain's misty top,  
Swell on the sight, and brighten with the dawn.<sup>87</sup>

The most forlorn aspects of nature are ennobled by the return of the summer season:

The precipice abrupt  
Projecting horror on the blackened flood,  
Softens at thy return. The desert joys,  
Wildly, through all his melancholy bounds.<sup>88</sup>

In the following passage Thomson's love of mountain solitude goes no deeper than a feeling of physical luxuriousness, such as Keats might express:

Thrice-happy he, who on the sunless side  
Of a romantic mountain, forest-crowned,  
Beneath the whole collected shade reclines;  
And fresh bedewed with ever-spouting streams,  
Sits coolly calm; while all the world without,  
Unsatisfied and sick, tosses in noon.<sup>89</sup>

But usually, like Theocles, he seeks such spots because they are sacred to the best thought and deepest inspiration of the philosopher. Emerson's charge that "Thomson's *Seasons* . . . are simply enumerations by a person who felt the common sights and sounds, without any attempt to draw a moral or affix a mean-

<sup>85</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>86</sup> *Spring*, 961-2.

<sup>87</sup> *Summer*, 54-5

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-6.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 458-63.

ing" <sup>100</sup> is, as Morel observes, only Emerson's way of saying that Thomson was not a transcendentalist.<sup>101</sup> If any poet ever moralised his song and made all things subservient to "Divine Philosophy," it was Thomson: to quote Morel again, "il a quelque chose de la methode du savant qui reconnaît dans chaque phénomène un anneau d'une chaine."<sup>102</sup> This spiritual valuation of nature frequently betrays itself in his treatment of mountains, and in such passages, whatever we allow to Thomson's originality or his indebtedness to early poets, there are undoubted traces of Shaftesbury's special suggestion. Alone with nature Thomson feels

A sacred terror, a serene delight.<sup>103</sup>

Shaftesbury thought the *genius loci* of the mountain would "make us feel divinity in these solemn places of retreat"; Thomson has the same kind of reverential feeling—

Oh! talk of Him in solitary glooms,  
Where o'er the rock, the sacred waving pine  
Fills the brown shade with a religious awe.<sup>104</sup>

In mountain solitudes, Theocles hoped to "charm the genius of the place . . . to inspire us with a truer song of Nature"; the "various forms of deity" which he thought "more manifest in these sacred silvan scenes" address themselves to the poet in the following strain:

Be not of us afraid,  
Poor kindred man! thy fellow-creatures, we  
From the same Parent-Power our beings drew;  
The same our Lord, and laws, and great pursuit.  
Once some of us, like thee, through stormy life,  
Toiled, tempest-beaten, ere we could attain  
This holy calm, this harmony of mind,  
Where purity and peace imingle charms.  
Then fear not us; but with responsive song,  
Amid these dim recesses, undisturbed  
By noisy folly and discordant vice,  
Of Nature sing with us, and Nature's God.  
Here frequent, at the visionary hour,  
When musing midnight reigns, or silent noon,  
Angelic harps are in full concert heard,

<sup>100</sup> *Poetry and Imagination*. Cf. Sir Leslie Stephen, *op. cit.*, II, p. 362.

<sup>101</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 360.

<sup>103</sup> *Summer*, 541. See also 522 ff.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Hymn*.



And voices chanting from the wood-crowned hill,  
 The deepening dale, or inmost sylvan glade;  
 A privilege bestowed by us, alone,  
 On contemplation, or the hallowed ear  
 Of poet, swelling to seraphic strain.<sup>105</sup>

The appreciation of nature was extended also to the severities of climate and season. "In 1725, or shortly before, were written three poems on Winter," says Miss Reynolds in reference to Armstrong's *Winter* (published 1770), Riccaltoun's *A Winter's Day* (published 1726), and Thomson's *Winter* (published 1726).<sup>106</sup> All of these denote a broadening of sympathetic interest, and all of them were by Scotchmen, whose sympathy was due partly to local environment; but it is significant that the praise is strongest in the avowed Deists, and that such appreciation is wanting in Scottish literature before the rise of Deism. After the success of Thomson's poem the sentiment became common. Akenside's *On the Winter Solstice* (1740) states the philosophic attitude of all the "Winter Poets"—

But let not man's unequal views  
 Presume o'er Nature and her laws;  
 'Tis his, with grateful joy, to use  
 The indulgence of the Sovereign Cause;  
 Secure that health and beauty springs,  
 Through this majestic frame of things,  
 Beyond what he can reach to know;  
 And that Heaven's all-subduing will,  
 With good, the progeny of ill,  
 Attempereth every state below.

Evidently, so far as praise of inanimate nature is concerned, little was left to the inventiveness of later poets except in the matter of phrasing and refinement upon details. The various characteristics I have so far noted are admirably summed up in a passage of Cooper's, which has a further claim to attention because it anticipates Wordsworth's theory of enjoyment through retrospection. The work of Memory, who acts as a handmaid to Art, is thus described:

Thro' Nature's various paths,  
 Alike, where glows the blossom'd pride of May,  
 Or where bleak Winter from the widow'd shrubs

<sup>105</sup> *Summer*, 544-563.

<sup>106</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 78.

Strips the gay verdure, and invests the boughs  
 With snowy horror; where delicious streams  
 Thro' flow'ry meadows seek their wanton course,  
 Or where on Afric's unfrequented coasts  
 The dreary desert burns; where e'er the ray  
 Of beauty gilds the scene, or where the cloud  
 Of horror casts its shade; *she* unrestrain'd  
 Explores, and in her faithful mirrour bears  
 The sweet resemblance, to revive the soul,  
 When absence from the sight forever tears  
 The source of rapture.<sup>107</sup>

This all-embracing sympathy with nature was made, of course, to include also the lower animals. It thus stimulated a humanitarian movement which probably owed its inception to oriental literature. That Shaftesbury's Deism contributed something is fairly evident from the fact that the movement in poetry was due largely to his imitators. Thomson's poetry, as I have shown in the article referred to above, is saturated with the sentiment, and the same doctrine is developed in the earlier verse of Needler. Baker's insistence upon the significance of the meanest objects led him into a similar strain of moralizing; in his tenderness for the very worms of the earth there is the spirit of Blake's *Book of Thel* and Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*. One passage of the kind has already been quoted from Cooper. Henry Brooke points the same moral, but in execrable phrase:

The flocks that nibble on the flowery lawn,  
 The frisking lambkin, and the wanton fawn;  
 The sight how grateful to the social soul,  
 That thus imbibes the blessings of the whole;  
 Joys in their joy, while each inspires his breast  
 With blessings multiply'd from all the bless'd! <sup>108</sup>

Now, whether we do or do not call this increased sympathy for nature romantic depends entirely upon our definition of romanticism, and for my purpose the use of the term is of little consequence. Certainly it was a new conception, far more catholic than any that had ever prevailed in English poetry and similar to the views expressed by later poets usually classified as romanticists. The supposition that it resulted from the renewed study and imitation of the elder poets clearly misses the fact. Earlier literature

<sup>107</sup> *The Power of Harmony*, bk. I, 214-227.

<sup>108</sup> *Universal Beauty*, bk. IV, 300-304.

had shown little inclination to condone the asperities of nature or to embrace natural creation as a whole. Poetry of the eighteenth century represents more than a recrudescence of early sentiment. After the first quarter of the century, when the recent discoveries in science were becoming generally known and men were beginning to apprehend the marvelous intricacies of natural law, nature took on a larger significance. Whether literature gained or lost by the addition—and that it did for a time lose spontaneity, no one questions—there is this obvious distinction, that the new poetry was painstakingly illustrating an hypothesis. Its interest in nature, like all other rationalistic interests, presupposed the sanction of logic and scientific information. The appreciation of the earlier periods had been determined much less by scientific law and the philosophic arguments occasioned by it. The nightmare of the atomic theory had scarcely been known, and theology had had no occasion to recommend all nature as the reflex of the Deity; it had, in fact, opposed this view. Appreciation of natural objects had, therefore, been less sophisticated. The poet of the eighteenth century, on the contrary, was committed to a moralized interpretation of all natural phenomena as parts of a stupendous revelation of God, the beauty of which consists in its complex unity and its nice conformity to the laws of science. In early literature appreciation was partial; it now became universal. Poetry, in other words, was beginning to assimilate the results of the increased scientific learning which had given impetus to the entire train of rationalistic philosophy.

But, it may be objected, the very presence of this scientific element is what distinguishes such poetry from that of the romanticists, which is said to be dominated wholly by the imagination. This objection, however, is based upon mere definition rather than historical fact. Probably a romanticist ought, for our convenience, to avoid all intercourse with the discoveries of the scientist; but in actual practice those poets whom we call romantic do not. Our modern poetry of nature takes full cognizance of scientific discovery. Shairp has shown that there is no conflict between "poetic wonder" and "scientific," but that the real business of the poet is to find and express the poetic in all knowledge.<sup>109</sup> Such

<sup>109</sup> *Op. cit.*, ch. III: "Poetic and Scientific Wonder"; ch. IV: "Will Science Put Out Poetry?"

an adaptation or fusion is essential, he thinks, to the very existence of poetry; like a religious creed, poetry that no longer responds to the accompanying state of human knowledge becomes impotent. Wordsworth recognized this law. "If," he declares, "the time should ever come when what is now called Science becomes familiarized to men, then the remotest discoveries of the chemist, the botanist, the mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the poet's art as any upon which it can be employed. He will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science, he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of Science itself. The poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the being thus produced as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man."<sup>110</sup> In this process of transfiguration Wordsworth himself was a prominent teacher, and so were Tennyson and various other poets who wrote of nature in the nineteenth century. Science did not throttle their imagination but gave it a larger scope in the new material revealed by a profounder intelligence.

The philosophical poets of the eighteenth century,

Led by the hand of Science and of Truth,<sup>111</sup>

were the pioneers in this movement. In the early stages of the assimilation the resulting product was frequently neither good science nor beautiful poetry. Much of this verse is exceedingly dry and seems to have little enough of the romantic. Its very faults are due largely to the philosophers who were imitated. Cudworth is uninspiring. King is invariably dry as dust. Much of the bad taste exhibited by Shaftesbury's followers may be traced to their model. Various passages in the *Characteristics*, for example, deal with the use of mineral treasures, "inglorious parts of nature in the nether world"; these and similar scientific touches are partly responsible for the pseudo-science that spoils much of Thomson and Akenside and still more of Brooke. Shaftesbury's treatment of nature is usually too general for artistic effect. Introduced for evidential purposes, it rivets the attention too closely upon the mechanism of his universe. In the poetical imitations, likewise, one con-

<sup>110</sup> Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.

<sup>111</sup> *The Power of Harmony*, bk. II, 246. See also Akenside's *Hymn to Science*.

stantly hears the creaking of this gigantic system; the method is so general and abstract that the modern reader, who is familiar with a much more poetic treatment of the subject, feels at times that the Deistic poets merely hypothecated nature as a text for a dry sermon. But this scientific habit is a fault quite natural to first efforts in this new field. Men were dealing with a universe newly revealed to human intelligence, and it is not surprising that at the outset the scientific facts were treated too literally and profusely while the spiritual truth was allowed to suffer by comparative brevity of treatment.

In spite of these amateurish faults in proportion, this Deistic verse, taken collectively, holds in solution the entire doctrine of the modern romantic school. Most of these poets were clumsy in their utterance; some of them used the couplet, which was ill-adapted to their purpose; and all of them were too fond of "nature's wide expanse." But if nature has any larger significance than mere sensuous delight, and if the full interpretation of nature requires the ardor of worship in addition to keen senses and deft phrasing, the imperfect work of the Deists is not to be despised. It represents the first stage in the evolution, a *disciplina arcani* through which English romanticism had to pass before the naïve and partial treatment found in our early literature could be replaced by that combination of descriptive excellence and philosophic thought which constitutes the distinctive quality in the modern romantic interpretation of nature.

### III

The indebtedness of poetry to philosophy for these various contributions has not been recognized even in the work of Thomson and Akenside. In Thomson's case there is a tendency to look for his interpretation in merely descriptive passages. Few of these exhibit a high degree of imagination; they are characterized rather by conscientious realism.<sup>112</sup> But Thomson's contribution to the romantic ideal, and therefore his historical importance, are to be estimated largely, just as Wordsworth's are, by philosophical passages which express his conception of nature as a whole. Thomson's worship of nature is a religious feeling running throughout

<sup>112</sup> See W. A. Neilson, *The Essentials of Poetry*, 1912, pp. 138-142.

the *Seasons*. Every scene described derives an added significance through the informing spirit arising from the poet's general conception of the outward and visible world as a revelation of the Deity. And to make a just estimate of this conception, we need to keep in mind two important considerations. In the first place, a study of Thomson must take equal account of the poets who preceded and those who followed him. Through such a comparison it becomes evident that he was the first English poet to express at all adequately the range and the intensity of our modern reverence for nature, and that largely through him and his English and Continental<sup>113</sup> imitators this phase of modern poetry came into general favor. In the second place, greater emphasis is to be placed on the relation of Thomson's religious views to his poetry. Sometimes he is cited as the first of the romanticists. It is recognized also that he is a Deist. But the two statements are never thoroughly co-ordinated. The truth is, Thomson was a forerunner of the romanticists in his treatment of nature because he was the first English poet to reflect at all fully the romantic tendencies inherent in Deism.

In dealing with Akenside, critics have not failed to mention him also as an early romanticist; but they have refused to see that his romanticism is the direct result of his imitation of the Deistic philosophers. Miss Reynolds<sup>114</sup> finds in *The Pleasures of the Imagination* the same "sacred order" of the universe and its spiritual effect which Wordsworth employs in *The Excursion*.<sup>115</sup> Again, she remarks that both *The Pleasures of the Imagination*<sup>116</sup> and the *Hymn to the Naiads*<sup>117</sup> lay "a Wordsworthian emphasis on the effect of nature on the soul of a child."<sup>118</sup> On the basis of these and other analogies, she concludes with surprise that "in the middle of the century we find a statement of poetical creed which, so far as the thought is concerned, might have come from 'The Excursion' or 'The Prelude.'" But, unfortunately for a

<sup>113</sup> See, for example, Haller's *Die Alpen* (1729) and Brockes's *Irdische Vergnügen in Gott* (1721), both of which were influenced by Thomson. Note, too, how the ideas of utility and beauty are combined.

<sup>114</sup> For discussion of Akenside, see *op. cit.*, pp. 123-127.

<sup>115</sup> Bk. iv, 1198-1219, 1254-1265.

<sup>116</sup> Bk. iv, 38-51 (1770).

<sup>117</sup> Ll. 234-249.

<sup>118</sup> As found in *Prelude*, bk. I, 402.

full understanding of the origin and historical development of this romantic theory which she traces, she did not observe that Akenside derived his "Wordsworthian conceptions" directly from the *Characteristics*. The whole matter of the poet's indebtedness she conveniently dismisses with the passing remark that *The Pleasures of the Imagination* "is a smooth, correct, rather frigid exposition of certain philosophical principles." To ignore Shaftesbury's responsibility for this poetic creed is to stop short of the real source of a very important literary doctrine.

When we turn from Thomson and Akenside to the other members of the school, we find criticism still less inclined to recognize the full truth. In order to extol Akenside, Miss Reynolds makes an assertion which precludes a just estimate of all the other poets of this group. Akenside, she says, is "one of the first of the poets of the age to insist on the beauty of all Nature." Certainly the philosophers and the poets I have discussed make it clear that there was nothing unusual in his emphasis "on the beauty of all Nature." This had been a commonplace of learned philosophy from the time of Cudworth's *True Intellectual System* (1678); it underlies the dry reasoning of King; it is the mainspring of Shaftesbury's teaching; and it informs Berkeley's "language or discourse of nature." "Plastic nature," "the chain of being," "universal beauty," and their various implications had been treated also in popular literature—by writers ranging in merit from Needler to Thomson. The "sacred order" of which Miss Reynolds makes a good deal in Akenside and Wordsworth is the fundamental assumption of such theory: Shaftesbury's "universal order and coherence of things," or "sacred order," is the prevailing topic of every Deistic poet discussed in this paper. Of the peculiar merits which she assigns to Akenside, the effect of nature on the plastic mind of the child is the only anticipation of nineteenth-century romanticists in which he was exceptional. In other words, if Akenside was an early romanticist, so were the other eighteenth-century poets of the Deistic school.

I insist chiefly, however, on the greater fault of those who habitually misrepresent the Deists as opposing and obstructing the so-called romantic attitude towards nature. Critics who do so restrict their view to advanced evolutionary stages of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In their anxiety to define roman-

ticism of the nineteenth century by contrast, they use the earlier period as a mere foil, overlooking the fact that the contrast is substantially one of diction, poetic form, descriptive skill, and other literary refinements rather than a contrast of actual interpretation. Such method ignores an early and important phase of a broad historical movement that brought into popular favor an interpretation of nature involving the rationalistic and the romantic views in a complementary relation. Had there been a long interval between the first and the second step of the process, less apology would be needed for the constant insistence on the incompatibility of the rational and the imaginative interpretation. But early in the Deistic movement, as I have shown, this association was clearly perceived and stated. The conclusion reached by pure reason served at once as an authoritative basis of fact for a more poetic conception of the natural universe than had ever before been at all common in any literature. That a writer was rational did not mean that he had laid by his imagination. "To state one argument is not necessarily to be deaf to all others, and that a man has written a book of travels in Montenegro, is no reason why he should never have been to Richmond." From Cudworth's "plastic nature" to Wordsworth's pantheism the development of the modern estimate of nature is consecutive.

To obtain a true historical perspective, we should compare the treatment of nature in English literature before the triumph of rationalism and afterwards. It will thus become clear that our modern sympathy for universal nature is largely an outgrowth of this philosophy. Even tolerance of mountains and other irregularities of the natural world was exceptional before the orthodox form of rationalism had begun its attack on ancient prejudices, and the apotheosis of nature as a moral and spiritual force came into our popular literature only after rationalism had passed beyond the limits sanctioned by the Church. The modern cult of nature-worship is in its origin, then, unorthodox—the result of a revived pagan philosophy enriched by the discoveries of modern science. There are in the Bible, of course, many passages pointing in the same direction and glowing with Eastern fervor; but the Church itself discouraged the pursuit of such ideas. Jealously guarding the doctrine of supernatural revelation and scenting danger in naturalism, the Fathers discountenanced any interpre-



tation of nature approaching the fullness of modern worship. There is ample evidence to confirm Biese's remark that "to Judaism and Christianity, Nature was a fallen angel, separated as far as possible from her God."<sup>119</sup> It is true that early Christian literature is notable for its interest in natural scenery, that a few medieval writers showed considerable appreciation of their native Alps, and that Catholic mystics were beginning in the Middle Ages to realize the possibilities of natural revelation. But their enthusiasm was soon checked. Such appreciation clearly demonstrated that the study of nature for religious and moral purposes is likely to end in conflict with the Christian dogma. Interest of the kind, especially when associated with science, was reproved by the Councils, and in the end effectually interdicted as a heresy.<sup>120</sup> The Anglican Church was no more liberal than the Roman Catholic, but through rationalism, which was invoked as a defense of her position, she was ironically betrayed into assumptions that afterwards threatened the complete overthrow of orthodox theology. When this insidious danger was completely unmasked, the English Church turned upon Deism the same anathemas that had formerly silenced the Catholic mystics. Again, the reproach of heresy was used. But for various reasons—partly because the new Religion of Nature was authorized by a fuller understanding of natural law than the earlier worship of nature had been—the outcome was different. For a time the full fruition of Deistic theory was delayed, but in the end the heretics were powerful enough to defy ecclesiastical authority. The final result of the fight between Deism and Christianity was a compromise which liberalized English thought in various ways. With the exception of independent ethics, the most important of the additions contributed by Deism is this liberal and enthusiastic appraisal of nature. Like the ethics of Deism, this too has gradually outgrown the taint of heresy and been generally accepted, at least for the purposes of poetry. The theological heresy of a former age has become the poetic creed of our own.

Unavoidably I have made the change in theology and the resulting ideas in poetry appear somewhat more sudden than it really was. English Deism actually began to take form as early as the

<sup>119</sup> *The Development of the Feeling for Nature in the Middle Ages*, etc., p. 22.

<sup>120</sup> See *Kosmos*, ed. 1850, II, Part I.

fifteenth century in the writings of Reginald Pecock; but his fate was a warning to others. There were similar intimations of the new creed in the popular literature of England before the eighteenth century. Reference has already been made to some of these. Undoubtedly a thorough examination would reveal a considerable number of precursors like Vaughan, especially in the period following the Renaissance, when English thought came under the influence of Greek philosophy. But these doctrines first crystallized into a complete system in the works of the Augustan rationalists, and the historical continuity of similar ideas in popular writings dates from the imitation of this school of philosophy by Deistic poets.

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